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New and old discs for your Christmas list

Four of the Gazette's music critics who cover the jazz, folk rock and pop scenes have selected what they feel are the season's best albums, both old and new, for Christmas giving — and receiving.

JAZZ: Delicate choice

By NIGHTHAWK

A gift of a musical recording can be a very delicate proposition. The choice can be problematic when it comes to jazz — there is so much available and the schools so varied.

Following is a partial breakdown in several categories of some of the best releases of the year.

Contemporary

In a contemporary mood, the two latest Mingus releases **Changes One and Changes Two** (Atlantic) rank high for the sophisticated listener. **Phenix** (Fantasy) is the last excellent recording by the Connonball Adderley Quintet. Also by Cannon, his early great recordings, just released, **In Memoriam** (Mercury) Oscar Peterson is featured on a new extensive series of duet recordings with trumpeters; the one **With Clark Terry** (Pablo) is a shining example. There is a re-issue from bassist Richard Davis, **With Understanding** (Muse) in company of Chick Corea; (previously issued as The Philosophy of The Spiritual).

Bassist Ron Carter's two recordings, **The NYJQ In Concert** (Salvation) and **Spanish Blue** (CTI) feature music accessible to all and are easily pleasant.

For the younger set, or listeners with an all-inclusive taste, the latest Rahsaan Roland Kirk, **The Case Of The 3 Sided Dream in Audio Color** (Atlantic) is a whole performance cum thrills.

Jazz for classical music fans is created by Gary Burton on **Seven Songs for Quartet and Chamber Orchestra** (ECM).

Also, there is pianistic prowess from Stanley Cowell, **Musa Ancestral Dreams** (Strata East); Randy Weston solo on **Blues for Africa** (Arista), just released, as well as Keith Jarrett **Koln Concert** (ECM). These are guaranteed not to offend non-jazzy ears and possibly delight them.

"Classical Jazz" from the master pianist Art Tatum is available on several labels. The cream of the crop is on two new series on Pablo: **Vol. 3 Solo** and **With Buddy De Franco**, from the Group Masterpieces. Also excellent, **God Is In The House** (Ony) and **Masterpieces** (MCA), a double album featuring different groupings and solo tracks.

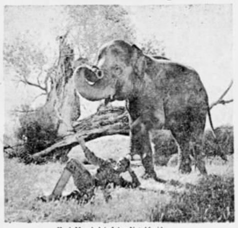
More classical jazz pianists, Meade Lux Lewis, Pete Johnson and Albert Ammons on **The Original Boogie Woogie Piano Giants** (Columbia); and for loads of traditional fun, **Armstrong/Bechet** (Mercury) just released on the Jazz Masters Series.

Modern

In the modern, progressive or avant-garde, there are several recordings from the atrocious to the brilliant. The most fascinating gem of creativity is undoubtedly Cecil Taylor, **Silent Tongues** (Arista) recorded live at Montreux 1974.

Another gem from Montreux, 1975, is the **Count Basie Jam Session.** In a category all by itself, this is a lesson in improvisation which demonstrates what great musicians can do with talent instead of electricity. The session includes trumpeter Roy Eldrige and vibist Milt Jackson.

For percussion fans, the two extremes are represented: **Paul Horn & Nexus** (Epic) is strangely evocative and most delicate, painted for all nature lovers. Hugh Masekela, **I'm Not Afraid** (Blue Thumb) is almost folkloric: Lotsa drums, sunshine, color, and happy vibes in vocals you can even dance to.



Hugh Masekela's I Am Not Afraid

The Great 50's are represented in a superb re-issue series from Blue Note with double albums from Herbie Hancock, and Horace Silver for piano showcases; Freddie Hubbard (trumpet), Sonny Rollins, Dexter Gordon and Stanley Turrentine reeds and Mel Lewis/Thad Jones for the big bands. All great.

For those interested in the sounds of giants John Coltrane and Miles Davis at their beginnings, there are two great re-issues of double albums: Coltrane's **Stardust Session** (Prestige) and Davis's **Dig** (Prestige). The music is very mellow and the ballads romantic. Good for nostalgic grownups or young jazz explorers.

Encyclopedias

Last, but absolutely not least, there are the jazz encyclopedias which can be an excellent introduction to jazz, as well as invaluable reference libraries. The two best are **Leonard Feather's series** for MCA, in three double-album forms, representing the '20s to the '60s. Blue Note's **Three Decades of Jazz** from the late '30s to the '70s, also in double-albums.

A Hancock monster too

ROCK: Good groups offer more

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ

How do some of rock's most respected groups cope with topping previous successes? New albums by The Who, Grateful Dead, J. Geils Band and The Band — all neatly timed for the Christmas shopping rush — indicate the answer is "More of the same".

The Dead, those venerable San Francisco trippers, are a slight exception.

Their latest, **Blues For Allah** (United Artists, their first for that company), is their best selling album of all and reveals Jerry Garcia, Phil Lesh and the gang moving into jazzier directions. There are extensive solos and the music has a lot more zip than previous stumbling outings.

However, the Dead — and Garcia in particular — have yet to escape a self-conscious uptightness in their attack, holding them from being a burning band. Maybe all that high living in the Bay Area has made them lazy.

The members of The Who spend much of their time between "epics" by dabbling in pallid solo projects and itsy bitsy group efforts. The new one, **Who By Numbers** (MCA), recalls the more idiosyncratic days of Happy Jack (a decade ago) but the production here is so slick that there is little crackle to their playing. Once The Who began taking themselves seriously as mod gurus, a subsequent glibness coated their sounds.

J. Geils' new title is **Hot Line** (Atlantic), which fairly sums up the work. Once again, vintage-styled rhythm and blues hyped up to an indefatigable degree. This is not a spectacular group, but in their own fidelity to the earthy sweaty R&B spirit, the J. Geils Band puts out consistent records that offer consistent party music.

Rustic, cool

Perhaps The Band is the outfit with the most to live up to. They can truly claim to do what no other group does: They set up a rustic atmosphere with cooly thought-out orchestrations of traditional rock 'n' roll and country music. Even when the arrangements become fancier and more convoluted, as they are on the longawaited **Northern Lights — Southern Cross** (Capitol), the earnest intellect of Robbie Robertson is felt. His best songs here are Acadian Driftwood (with a few French verses) and Forbidden Fruit, but the standard seems to be repeating itself.

Perhaps The Band clings a little too eagerly to the past, as some of the material getting blurred by sameness.

They'd do themselves as musicians and their fans a favor by stretching out into some funkier grooves on record; they are too good, and Robertson is too distinctive a guitarist, to continue limiting themselves to such rusticity.

Herbie Hancock let loose a monster when he adopted the synthesizer as the main thrust of his keyboard assault. Since the success of his breakthrough disc, Head Hunters — the biggest selling jazz album of all — many of his contemporaries and competitors have plugged in, often with prosaic results.

However, Hancock himself has continued to develop electronics in terms of texture and expression. His latest album, **Man Child** (Columbia), features his lushest and most intelligent use of synthesizers (half a dozen types). The main thing here is that Hancock's electronics do not sound synthetic. In fact, there are many "natural" sounds (particularly from tropical life) that were not adequately represented before Hancock's vibrant colorations.

The six pieces on Man Child are all packed tight with sound, as the keyboardist's "Head Hunters" group complements him with funky rhythms, dense percussions and floaty reeds. There is also a modern Motown-soul influence here: Most of the tunes take off on elaborations of the basic "wah wah" riff (Hancock collaborated with Motowner Mel Ragin on several tunes). Stevie Wonder steps in for a fine harmonica solo as well.

Herbie Hancock's Man Child

Electric bass

Meanwhile, the electric bass wonder Stan Clarke, the prodigy from Chick Corea's Return to Forever, has hooked up a synth to his cutom-made bass on his second solo outing, **Journey To Love** (Newporer), which really is what all those ads have claimed, "Portrait of the artist as a young man".

This is a work of variety and superb craftsmanship, and Clarke explores the spiritual life themes to considerably more effect than jazz-rock superstars Corea and Mahavishnu McLaughlin.

These two join Clarke in a couple of all-acoustic pieces, Song For John Coltrane, that are surely the most genuinely reflective performances they've come up with in years.

The long Concerto For Jazz-Rock Orchestra is an intelligently organized working on a jazz-rock cliche, while the shorter pieces are models of economy: Hello Jeff is an infectious rocker with guitarist Jeff Beck while Silly Putty is just that, slipping and sliding funkiness. Keyboardist George Duke, who spent years with Frank Zappa and Cannonball Adderly, is featured throughout with the most whimsical synthesizer style of all current practitioners.

Perhaps a sense of humor was all that was needed for Jan Hammer's solo shot, **The Seven Days** (Newporer), which is almost exclusively comprised of keyboards.

As if to emphasize that fact, there's a note on the back cover stating that there's no electric guitar included (he does sound like a rather cranked-out guitar though).

Hammer, who has sounded better in supporting roles since the breakup of the original Mahavishnu Orchestra, has plenty of technique in this pastiche vision of The Creation, yet he seems too intent on blowing our minds to move us.

Good oldies

Meanwhile, re-released oldies by rock 'n' roll's hall-of-famers continue to do brisk business.

Good Vibrations : The Best of The Beach Boys (Brother-Reprise) is a succinct (one disc) compilation of the group's most characteristic post-1965 music. They were no longer surfers but "creators" and their songs here inspired definitions of the Southern California reverie, of which their current material is but a shadow.

FOLK: LPs to enjoy over and over again

By MIKE REGENSTREIF

1975 saw the release of quite a few excellent albums in the loosely defined 'folk' category. Most of the following records are by artists that get little if any air play on the local 'hip' radio stations so, chances are some of these are unfamiliar names.

Because most of these are not radio-oriented artists they don't turn out album after album of one or two great cuts and 10 or 11 tracks of vinyl waste. These are all albums that one will want to enjoy from start to finish over and over again.

On The Track (Warner Brothers) is the first release by the recluse Leon Redbone.

Redbone is the man that plucks you out of the present and puts you into a smoky speakeasy during prohibition as he regales you with some of the best pop, jazz and country tunes of the '20s, '30s and early '40s. His guitar playing is deadly accurate as it duplicates the work of Fats Waller's piano and Redbone's voice has been properly treated with fine cigars and bourbon whiskey.

Seeger

The concerts on Pete Seeger's 1974 tour with Arlo Guthrie were recorded in Montreal, New York, Boston and Chicago. The resulting album, **Together in Concert** (Reprise) shows these two folk singers at their best, singing to and with people rather than studio microphones.

The album is a four-sided affair in which Seeger demonstrates why audiences have loved him for over 30 years and will go on loving him for as long as he cares to perform. Arlo Guthrie has been around men like Seeger all of his life and more than holds his own as he trades songs with one of his father's favorite singing partners.

El Capitan (Philo) is the second in a series of thematic concept albums by Utah Phillips.

Phillips is an incredible showman and sometimes this makes one forget he is also one of the most intelligent songwriters on the folk scene. This album tells the stories of the western United States as Phillips really knows them. Forget anything you've seen on television when you listen to these songs. The album is an education and a truly satisfying and enjoyable one at that.

A double album of note is the latest release by the great Doc Watson. **Memories** (United Artists) is a batch of new recordings by the blind flat picker that showcase many of the different influences Watson has had since he began to play as a boy, in North Carolina, back in the '30s.

McLauchlan

Only The Silence Remains (True North) by Murray McLauchlan is also a double album.

The Toronto singer-songwriter was recorded in concert this past spring in Halifax and the two records do an

Pete Seeger

excellent job of capturing McLauchlan's live performance. He sings many of his best songs, one traditional tune and accompanies himself on guitar, piano and harmonica. The only other musician is Dennis Pendrith, an amazing electric bass player.

Sylvia Tyson's first solo album, **Woman's World** (Capitol) is just that. Tyson sings of the lives of women, their relationships to themselves, their men, families, careers etc. Tyson is the veteran of about 15 Ian & Sylvia albums and her many years of experience went into making this anything but a debut album.

Surprise

The music of Canadian singer-composer Bruce Cockburn continues to expand. His brand new album, **Joy Will Find A Way** (True North) contains what long time Cockburn fans have come to expect, plus more.

There's a great instrumental and some quiet songs with interesting musical lines and lyrics that express values that are different than one expects from most top recording artists. The surprise on this album is the distinctive Caribbean sound that Cockburn achieves on two cuts including the catchy Burn, Baby, Burn.

Pieces Of The Sky, (Reprise) the first major effort by Emmy Lou Harris is a gem. The album showcases Harris' beautifully country voice and if you like what Linda Ronstadt can do with a country ballad you'll love Emmy Lou Harris. The material ranges from uptempo to slow and dreamy and the production by Canadian Brian Ahern is impeccable.

Last but far from least is **Bob Dylan's Blood On The Tracks** (Columbia). This is possibly the most personal album that Dylan has or will ever make.

Dylan has previously written many songs that are on the level of the ones contained in this package but never has he put them together in an album this strong.

POP: To give and receive

By DOUG PRINGLE

Supertramp's last album Crime of the Century received such acclaim that many felt it would be impossible for them to follow it successfully.

Only time will tell if **Crisis? What Crisis?** (A & M) proves as successful.

On initial hearing it does not have as many outstanding songs as Crime but side one is a real masterpiece. The five songs run into one another, creating an extended musical journey. A Soapbox Opera could be the best thing they have ever done but all the songs on this side are excellent.

Side two, on the other hand, is a bit inconsistent. Lady tries for, but doesn't achieve, the excitement of Dreamer on the last album.

As well as Supertramp's familiar classical feel What Crisis? also has a melodic quality that surpasses Crime. Two of Us, Easy Does It, and Soapbox Opera all have melodies that, once heard, keep rolling around your brain.

Bim, a Canadian living in Vancouver, has come up with one of the freshest records in quite a while. **A Kid Full of Dreams** (Casino records).

Irrisistable

His crystal clear voice has a joy that is impossible to resist. Add to that some great melodies and excellent production by Claire Lawrence and the result is a superb album, sparkling with positive energy.

He is equally at home on the rocking Me and My Baby, the country Betsy and the Blue Boys, the bluesy Waitin' for You, Mama, or the poignant Leave it to the Lord

Nanette Workman

It is one of those rare albums on which highlights are hard to pick out since each cut has something special to recommend it.

Time test

The two albums above are both new but if you're looking for some albums that are standing the test of time either to give or receive for Christmas then here are some suggestions.

Pink Floyd's **Shine On You Crazy Diamond** (Capitol) keeps sounding better and better. More bluesy than their last, it is in many ways more effective. They have taken more time to develop their ideas and arrangements and studio effects are simpler. Definitely one for the Christmas stocking

An album that has been out quite a while yet still sounds fresh and exciting is Nanette Workman's **Lady Marmalade** (Pasha) Dancer is already a classic but by no means the only outstanding cut on the album.

Pas Fou is a raucus rocker that gives lie to the theory that the French language doesn't lend itself to rock and roll. Rapelle Toi is great rock ballad but Shame On You and the powerful way it builds could well be the highlight.

This one is well worth having in your collection to tide you over till her new one comes out in the New Year.

Enthusiasm

An album that was initially dismissed as just another James Taylor album has proven to be a most pleasant surprise.

Gorilla (Warner Bros.) contains his best collection of songs since Mud Slide Slim. He also seems to have rediscovered his enthusiasm giving his songs a sparkle they have lacked recently. Some lovely Graham Nash harmony graces Mexico; Sarah Maria has a delightful wistful beauty about it; and Lighthouse contains all that is good about James Taylor.

Finally a suggestion for those whose musical tastes you're unsure of. **Fleetwood Mac** (reprise) would be your safest bet. They have been called the softest hard rock band and the heaviest soft rock band in the world

Add to that the best album the group has done and you have a good chance your present will be well received. Christine McVie, Lindsay Buckingham and Stevie Nicks all provide great songs and vocal performances on an album that is strong throughout, an increasing rarity these days.

Have a merry musical Christmas.

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